

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

August 24, 2023

VIA ELECTRONIC TRANSMISSION

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
Secretary
Department of Agriculture

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

On May 25, 2023, we sent you a letter with respect to the Recreation.gov contract between Booz Allen Hamilton (Booz Allen) and the United States Forest Service (USFS) to determine, in part, the extent of taxpayer money spent to support the platform in light of media reports that Booz Allen “invoiced the government for more than \$140 million from October 2018 to November 2022.”¹ On August 11, 2023, Chief of the United States Forest Service (USFS), Randy Moore, sent us a one-page letter that failed to answer six out of eight questions, and it did not dispute reporting regarding \$140 million being invoiced to the government. Moreover, the response failed to provide any requested documents.² The questions USFS failed to answer either in full or in part include:³

1. How much taxpayer money did the U.S. Forest Service pay Booz Allen to assume operation of Recreation.gov? Provide all records.
2. [D]o the agencies and bureaus approve individually the amounts Booz Allen charges for each transaction fee? If not, how have the agencies and bureaus overseen the determination of the amounts to be assessed for transaction fees? Provide all records.
3. Since 2017, how much money in transaction fees and related charges has Booz Allen charged the public? Provide annual totals by department or bureau.

¹ Letter from Senator Charles Grassley, Ranking Member, Senate Budget Committee, and Senator John Barrasso, Ranking Member, Senate Energy & Natural Resources Committee, to Tom Vilsack, Secretary, United States Department of Agriculture, and Deb Haaland, Secretary, United States Department of the Interior, (May 25, 2023), [2023-05-25 CEG to USDA and DOI \(Booz Allen Contract\) \(senate.gov\)](https://www.senate.gov/legislative/record/2023/05/25/2023-05-25_CEG_to_USDA_and_DOI_(Booz_Allen_Contract)_senate.gov); Allison Pohle, *National Park Visits Are Surging, and One Firm Is Making Unexpected Millions*, THE WALL STREET JOURNAL, (April 6, 2023), <https://www.wsj.com/articles/national-park-fees-booz-allen-68d4d6d8>.

² Letter from Randy Moore, Chief, United States Forest Service, to Senator Charles Grassley, Ranking Member, Senate Budget Committee, (August 11, 2023), (on file with Comm. staff).

³ If the USDA is unable to answer any of these questions, we request that the USDA precisely describe why it is unable to answer.

4. How much money was paid to Booz Allen in regard to processing fees to access Red Rock Canyon Conservation Area, prior to the required notice-and-comment period being completed? Will there be a refund for all charges? If not, why not? Provide all records.
5. What steps have USDA and USFS taken to better notify the public of the fee-structure Booz Allen benefits from? Provide all records.⁴
6. How many information technology (IT) personnel does USDA and USFS employ?

Concerning the first question, Chief Moore said that “Recreation.gov is not funded by taxpayer dollars.”⁵ However, taxpayers pay surcharges when ordering tickets on Recreation.gov, which are ultimately paid to Booz Allen through the U.S. Treasury as part of its contractual agreement with USFS. We would therefore appreciate clarification with respect to the statement that Recreation.gov “is not funded by taxpayer dollars.”

Concerning question two, Chief Moore answered that, “Federal agency partners set all fees on the Recreation.gov platform via the terms of the Recreation.gov contract, which pay for the entire Recreation.gov program.”⁶ However, he failed to provide the requested records showing the amount charged as fees and failed to provide the actual fee schedule for each agency partner.

Similarly, concerning question three, Chief Moore answered that the “Federal Government collects the reservation service fees charged” and then sends those fees to “the U.S. Department of the Treasury, which then reimburses the contractor...”⁷ He also noted that, “[a] portion of the collected reservation fee” is provided to the agencies that are part of Recreation.gov.⁸ However, he did not provide how much money in fees has been collected and transmitted to the Treasury, the amount reimbursed to the contractor, or the amount provided to the respective government agencies at issue.

It appears that the rest of the outstanding questions were simply ignored. The American people have a right to know the answer to each question we asked because the answers involve *their* parks and *their* money.

In light of USFS’s failure to substantively and promptly respond to our letter dated May 25, 2023, please answer the aforementioned questions and provide all requested records no later than September 7, 2023.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter. Should you have any questions, please contact Jace Pimentel at (202) 224-0642.

⁴ The original letter was transmitted to USDA and the Department of Interior. Accordingly, the question used, “your departments.” Here, because this letter is only addressed to the USDA and the fact that USFS is the relevant agency within USDA, question 5 and 6 are addressed to USDA and USFS.

⁵ Letter from Moore, *supra* note 2.

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ *Id.*

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Chuck Grassley". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Charles E. Grassley
Ranking Member
Committee on the Budget

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "John Barrasso". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

John Barrasso
Ranking Member
Committee on Energy & Natural Resources